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ABSTRACT

Since the rise of the whole language movement, Sylvia Ashton-Warner's key vocabulary, individualized reading, and experience charts have been notable for their omission from the many books available on whole language. Whole language strength is notable in at least four major areas: (1) its learner-centeredness; (2) its scorn of commercial behavioristic material, such as basals and workbooks; (3) its demand for integration of all curriculum, especially the language arts; and (4) its salutary insistence on authenticity in teaching methodology. Omission of key vocabulary, individualized reading, and experience charts from current practice is puzzling, since each is compatible with the four characteristics of whole language. One explanation for this omission is that divergence is not considered "pure" whole language. Also, the expansion of the whole language movement has taken place since 1970, but the three activities were popular before 1970. The publication dates of entries in the bibliographies of five major whole language texts were analyzed. Results indicated that 92% of the citations bore dates after 1970. Particularly noteworthy is one page from one of the bibliographies which reveals an ignorance of the disputes that have roiled the field of reading for decades by including only one reference to "phonics," the only subject other than whole language mentioned. Findings suggest that proponents of whole language have chosen to ignore, or were ignorant of, approaches and activities popular before 1970 that were compatible with their philosophy. (A 22-item bibliography is attached.) (RS)

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COMMENTARY

WHOLE LANGUAGE AND ITS PREDECESSORS

by

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Since the rise of the Whole Language movement, I have been wondering whatever happened to 1) Sylvia Ashton- Warner's Key Vocabulary, 2) Individualized Reading, and 3) the Experience Chart. These are three activities I have enthusiastically espoused for many years. In scanning the many books now available, the omission of these three activities is noteworthy and puzzling. As they seem to me to be so clearly in the child-centered ballpark, and thus so compatible with Whole Language philosophy, why, then, is their absence so conspicuous ? This is an anomaly that I would like to examine.

Nor am I the only person wondering why certain educators, or activities, especially those prominent before 1970, are so rarely found in current Whole Language literature. For example, Goffin(1991) asks the same question about Carolyn Pratt, a 1930's and 40's educational crusader in New York City (1990). In more general terms Harold H. Herber, (1990) deplored the lack of attention to earlier traditional contributors and their contributions to the profession.

There is no doubt that the Whole Language movement, as labelled in TEACHER MAGAZINE (1991) is revolution, a wonderful, radical, red revolution of major proportions. And it is sweeping the country. The Second Whole Language Umbrella Conference in Phoenix in August, 1991 served to increase my hopes that that day was closer for the kind of education I have worked for for decades.. There I heard teachers--hundreds of them-- applaud those speakers making derogatory remarks about basals, workbooks, and other facets of traditional, commercial, educational material. The enthusiasm, the professionalism, the YOUTH, the concern for children, of the those attending that conference, was exhilarating. I have waited over thirty years for such a reaction. That excitement was certainly was in marked contrast to an earlier educational conference I attended, in Las Vegas. Maybe those in Las Vegas FELT the same way. But it did not show like it did in Phoenix.

While it is not the purpose of this paper to evaluate typical on-going practices in the Whole Language classroom, as tempting as that exercise might be, I do wish to raise some questions as to why the above educational approaches, especially, are so infrequently found. One reason might be that

the literature has concentrated on more recent, post-1970, material. This can be attributed, perhaps, to the rapid pace of the development of the Whole Language movement itself. Certainly such classrooms have been evolving in markedly unique ways than those that have gone before. It is easier to identify one when observing schools. Whole Language classrooms are simply different than others, and many of us are very glad for it.

Yet the movement is paying a price for this unprecedented singularity. Like Topsy, it has grown so rapidly that it is not yet gotten its act together. Its incredible growth in popularity has brought about, in many schools and teachers, a "have-you-been -saved" syndrome that is noticeable. To me, this brings back memories, as I, personally, suffered thru the same pattern, twenty years ago, during the "Individualized Reading" era. In this instance, history is repeating itself, and a similar backlash is developing. Hostility and antagonism to the very name of Whole Language itself is rearing its head in the same way that the term and practice of "Individualized Reading" did twenty years ago. This is true, not only in the halls of academe, but among many proponents of Whole Language itself. Such hostility towards <u>both</u> of these approaches may come from angry personal responses to certain professional accusations, published and spoken. But there is more to it than that.

Whole Language Characteristics.

There is no question that Whole Language strength is notable in at least four major areas. 1) Its learner-centeredness, 2) Its scorn of commercial behavioristic material, such as basals and workbooks, and 3) Its demand for the integration of all curriculum, especially, the language arts, and 4) Its salutary insistence on authenticity in teaching methodology. This is what I find so admirable. To examine the anomaly I referred to above, let me describe each of these three approaches whose infrequency I find disturbing, and apply the four characteristics to see just how compatible each is with Whole Language philosophy. First, let us begin with Sylvia Ashton-Warner's Key Vocabulary.

KEY VOCABULARY.

In this activity, (#11, 1986)a teacher elicits a word spontaneously from a child. The teacher does not know what the word might be, but urges that it be a "good" one, i.e.to the child. The teacher then prints the word on a piece of tag board, and asks the child to identify each letter, if necessary referring to the alphabet posted on the nearby wall. Then the child is asked to trace the letters, following the western traditional left-to right directionality. Finally, the child is asked to "read" the word from the card, which is taken to his desk for incorporating into writing, and related language arts.

Now to compare this with Whole Language philosophy. In Key Vocabulary we find: 1). Learner-centeredness. All words are the child's. NONE are given by the teacher. 2) No commercial materials. No basal readers, or workbooks needed for the activity. 3) Integration. Reading, writing, speaking, listening are all part of the activity. 4) Authenticity. All products are valid personal expressions of the learner. No assignments from outside sources are made, or needed.

Next let us look at Individualized Reading and apply our four characteristics.

INDIVIDUALIZED READING

In this activity,(#13. 1986) reading instruction takes place ONLY with books that are chosen by the learner, using the Rule of Thumb for finding appropriate reading level. Individual, one-to-one conferences , on a self-selected book (about one out of ten read) follow with the teacher The teacher explores, a). Personal reasons for book choice.b) main idea presented by author, and appreciation of its literary quality and meaning,c) phonics and other mechanical details for reading proficiency., and finally d) love of audience appreciation from oral reading. As the teacher confers with each child over the week, records are kept of needs, interests, etc. that would provide a topic for a group to examine, study more intensively. Those elements needing further work or instruction are taken care of by the teacher on individual, group, or class basis. Mini lessons are prominent and

useful. Nor is it precluded that a group could meet on a chosen book with the teacher acting as chair.

Now to compare this activity with the Whole Language philosophy. 1) Learner-centeredness: No book is chosen by the teacher and assigned to a learner. Literature appreciation as a whole class activity can be developed on teacher-chosen books. But never when the goal is instruction. 2) No commercial materials. No basal readers, workbooks, or printed exercises of any kind are desired or needed. Such destroy the personal choice element needed to promote the love of reading.3)Integration. The total curriculum can be covered by independent seatwork while the teacher is conducting individual or group conferences. Projects in writing, math (original story problems), science, history, et al, become part of the school day. 4) Authenticity. No learning is developed on other than that personally chosen book, and other realistic, non-assignment activities.

Finally, the Experience Chart, part of the Language Experience approach, is described and judged.

THE EXPERIENCE CHART.

This activity(#12, 1986) is being considered as a part of the Language Experience approach as a whole. ANY time children's own language is used (see above with Key Vocabulary, for example,) constitutes some element of Language Experience. But for my present purpose, I wish to deal only with this type of class "newspaper" when the whole class is together, usually in the early grades, to illustrate my argument. In this activity, the teacher elicits from the whole class accounts of those most recent happenings, "that every one would like to hear about". After all listen to the various events, the teacher. NOT the class, chooses that event that has the most dramatic promise. The teacher, should be aware of the difference between the oral and written language modalities and so must transmogrofy the spoken account into written form on the chalk board or easel. Usually four or five events can constitute one daily chart. This "news" becomes a written record of the children's lives, in and out of school, and can be used as material that children can refer to during the rest of the day when working on individual writing, math. science.

etc. projects. The teacher concludes the chart time period by having the class read the "newspaper" aloud, and making the next possible use of instruction to promote literacy.

Now let us compare this activity to Whole Language Philosophy. 1) Learner-centeredness. ALL events are from the children's lives. Never does the teacher ask them to relate an event that conforms to an assigned topic. 2) No commercial material. No drills, texts, or other commercial material needed or desired. 3) Curriculum integration. As the "news" comes from the class, it can, and does, cover such curriculum aspects, as math, history, economics(!) science, etc. 4) Authenticity. As all discussion originates with pupils. all discussion requires authentic topics. To talk about an occurrence that was not part of THAT class' living experience, would not be authentic and so destroy the drive to learn and find out about the world.

Reasons Behind the Lack of Emphasis?

The above description and discussion are designed, of course,to bolster my belief that these activities should not be omitted from current practice. Education, in my opinion, has suffered from their absence in the classroom. The obvious question is why are they missing? Perhaps the heart of the matter lies in they differ in certain ways from current, unique, current Whole Language classroom practice. I am asking why these, and other learner-centered activities of yore, being ignored? Why are they so unfamiliar to so many budding,young 1991 teachers? Why is the methodology of Whole Language classrooms being developed as if there had never been any other practice, equally learner- centered, equally non-commercial, equally non-behavioristic in its teaching? Why are earlier activities being discouraged, ignored or, at least, not recognized as valid education? Why is it so difficult for Whole Language proponents to accept divergence, **even when such divergence is clearly compatible with the dearest precepts of the Whole Language philosophy.**

Perhaps it is because divergence is not considered "pure" Whole Language"? I think that may well be the case, as the following incident illustrates. A principal of an elementary school known and admired for its Whole Language classrooms, stated, after watching a videotaped demonstration of Sylvia Ashton-Warner's Key Vocabulary. "It is good, but **I AM A PURIST.**" In other words, she felt that learner-centered practice in **ANY OTHER FORM** than what she considered Whole Language was , to her, not "pure", and therefore not Whole Language. Is it because such teaching is so different, that many Whole Language classrooms--and their advocates--are coming to be seen as a cultish, "If-you-dont-do-it-our-way, you-ain't-doing-it" attitude. Either you belong to the Whole Language club, or you are not in the "loop".

But, however robust, the Whole Language movement is still very young, not even two decades old. Have its current advocates, never experienced any of these early activities? Have current advocates not chosen to look at previous developments? Could these approaches I have described, and others, too, have been considered, and **REJECTED**? If so, I raise the question of "WHY?" Could such a decision to reject stem from a **lack of actual teaching experience on the part of Whole Language proponents in a classroom?** Could that actual experience be at appropriate grade levels? Answering such questions is difficult. But if earlier practices were judged unacceptable to many Whole Language proponents, that can explain why current Whole Language classrooms are so different from others. EVEN if those others are NOT traditional, text book driven, behavioristic situations. It is not sinful to be different, of course because being different can be desireable. But being different can lead to the development of some of the antagonism and hostility that is now apparent. That the words "Whole Language" are being banned, to my great regret, its continued existence could regrettably be in jeopardy. Part of the problem lies in the insistence that, "If- you-dont-do -it- our- way, you-aint-doin' it!" Peace and serenity is more easily obtained when all know, and understand, what is going on. But if youth, inexperience, and the excitment of a burgeoning movement, could affect scholarship? Is this why earlier "heroines" and approaches, demonstrably analogous to Whole Language philosophy, have been skipped?

ASSESSING BIBLIOGRAPHICAL DATES PRE-1970.

As the expansion of the movement did not take place until the mid-1970's, the matter of dates becomes important in examining causes for the low priority of earlier activities. To begin with, it must be recognized that these three activities I am referring to, whatever their merits, were popular before 1970. Ashton-Warner's "TEACHER" came out in 1962. Dorris May Lee's first book bore a 1943 date, and its second edition with Roach Van Allen was published in 1963. My first article on Individualized Reading appeared in 1954. Willard Olsen's pamphlet in 1952 was the true beginning of literature - based approaches to reading. Other writings analogous to current Whole Language thinking in emergent literacy were even earlier. Alvina Burrows (1939) began the demise of traditional "composition" a decade before. The educational volcano at Teachers College Columbia with its Horace Mann Lincoln promotion of the Activity Program, block building (Patty Hill), social studies units (Frederick Bonser), and much else, erupted in the 1920's. Alice Keliher effectively destroyed the ideological base of ability grouping. (1931) Carolyn Pratt (1948), mentioned earlier was notable in private schooling in post war New York City. And there are many others.

The Importance of the 1970 Date.

Thus the date of 1970 becomes important. In the current voluminous literature, in the Whole Language genre, especially books from Heinemann, have hardly been on the market since 1970. The questions I am raising about the activities cited above were popular BEFORE 1970. Thus my reasoning follows that pre-1970 activities were not prevalent, nor popular enough, to draw the attention and examination by the recent crop of Whole Language advocates. This leads me to take a look at the literature and examine the dates in the bibliographies of selected texts.

To examine this problem, I selected five major texts, recognized as important in the field of Whole Language. Blake, R.W. (1990). Froese, Victor, (1990). Hansen, J. Newkirk, T & Graves, D.(1985). Newman, Judith M. (1985). Weaver, Constance, (1988). While there are many other texts in the literature of Whole Language, I feel safe in assuming that the proportion indicated about in our findings would not be changed significantly , even if other bibliographies were examined. There are, of course, many others, but these should serve my purpose, as it will be seen in our following presentation.

INTELLECTUAL INCEST IN FOOT NOTES?

My first impression in studying these bibliographies was that of, a la Yogi Berra, deja vu all over again. Years ago a professor of mine, in referring to a flood of curriculum books then on the market muttered, "I do wish they would stop committing intellectual incest by writing foot notes to each other!" That comment of many years ago came to mind. So frequently were the Goodmans, Smith, Harste, Graves, Calkins, and many others , listed that without them, these selected texts would have had much shorter bibliographies! Maybe not better, but certainly shorter!

FREQUENCY OF CITATION

A tally of the bibliography of each text, came to 1424 different entries. Of these 1248 citations, or 92%, bore dates **after 1970**. While 176, or 8%, were published **before** 1970. That ratio of 8 to 1 indicates the heavy preference, by the authors or editors of these Whole Language texts, of recent writings **after**- 1970. However, there were educators of earlier years included who must be mentioned. What follows is the list of names of those that were not only well known before 1970, but held compatible views, in my opinion, to learner-centered education. After each name,you will notice, is the frequency of their mention in these separate five texts.

1. Sylvia Ashton-Warner: cited once. Key Vocabulary five times.
2. Alvina Burrows , no listing.

3. Language Experience; Dorris May Lee cited once, Roach Van Allen twice, and Mary Ann Hall (i.e. Language Experience)twice. Russell Stauffer, four times
4. Willard Olsen, once
5. Jeannette Veatch, twice, Individualized Reading four times.
6. Alice Keliher, no listing
7. Winifred Ward, no listing
8. Lev Vygotsky, four times
9. Edmund Huey, three times.

Nila Banton Smith, William S. Gray, John Holt, and Rudolph Flesch were also found, but I question their early relationship to Whole Language movement.

FLESCH AND BASALS

However, one page in all of those bibliographies needs special comment. Constance Weaver on page 467 (1988), I feel, reveals a surprising ignorance about the disputes that have roiled the field of reading for decades. On that page, out of thirteen references, there is not ONE mention of Language Experience, nor of Sylvia Ashton-Warner, nor of the most rancorous of all, (to which I can personally attest), Individualized Reading. She does list one reference that has the word "Phonics" in the title. Is "phonics" the ONLY problem is the past history of reading? When the International Reading Association has only had two presidents in its nearly thirty years of existence who were NOT basal authors, are we to assume that there has never been attacks against them? There have been many, and I am not the only one known for such intransigence against commercialization in the classroom. In addition, Weaver gives prominence to Rudolph Flesch,(1955) that his phonics system was his greatest contribution. Many reading specialists think so, too.. But I think they are wrong. On a 1961 platform I shared with him at Lehigh University, I heard him tell how his son and neighborhoods friends developed and played with those phonics he wrote up. It was then that HE said his contribution was the first all-out, and long overdue, attack on basal readers. I agree. In 1961 I was a lonely fighter against such

commercialism. So I was delighted to find a cohort in that battle that is still not over, even tho I am still of the opinion that his phonics are ridiculous. The idea that centers around the "whole word" fuss, i.e. the phonics disputes, is, in my opinion, an example of bait-and-switch tactic on the part of traditional reading people to protect the sacred cow of basals. Rudolph Flesch started the ball rolling, not in phonics so much as against basals. It is good to know that the Whole Language contingency is on the same side. The strong thrust against basalese is indeed welcome.

COMPARISON WITH ANOTHER STUDY.

While the preceding is a brief accounting of the pre-and post- 1970 bibliographical references in five Whole Language texts, there is another study that sheds light on the same question. This study, Blanchard et al (1991) selected twelve reading methodology texts, rather that texts specifically aimed at a Whole Language audience. His methodology was similar to mine, in that names, rather than separate citations, were tallied as to the number of books in which each was listed. No matter how many books of a given author were included in the body of the book, only the name itself, rather than the number of references was tallied. Not surprisingly, there were many names listed, covering decades of publishing in reading instruction. Interestingly, he found no name listed in ALL twelve texts. But from the many that were tallied, for the purposes of this paper, I have selected only those who, in my opinion, could be considered valid predecessors to the Whole Language movement, and therefore related to the main inquiry I am pursuing. Here are the findings:

NUMBER OF TEXTS	IN WHICH AUTHORS ARE LISTED.
11	Goodman K, Smith,F.
10	Clay, M.
9	none related to area

Conclusion.

This paper began with my questioning of why certain activities and approaches, popular before 1970, are rarely found in current Whole Language literature. One study citing specific bibliographies from selected Whole Language texts, revealed the heavy preponderance of items published after 1970. In another study by Blanchard of authors, in the genre of our concern, mentioned in reading methodology texts,were mentioned far more frequently than in the former references. It can be assumed, I think, that proponents of Whole Language chose to ignore, or were ignorant of, approaches and activities popular before 1970, that were compatible with their philosophy.

I cannot close my discussion without indicating that I find some flaws in the present practice of Whole Language. The most serious of which, in my opinion, is the lack of respect for instruction that is not behavioristic in character. But that is another story, and another paper.

POSTSCRIPT.

Although I have noted that the name of Sylvia Ashton-Warner and her Key Vocabulary have received short shrift on the general educational scene, surprising developments have come to my attention only recently. It is a testimony to the strength of Sylvia's educational impact that there are now three books in process. Each has contacted those of us who were known to be her friends; Selma Wasserman, William Cliett and myself come to mind. These authors are: 1). Sydney Gurewitz Clemens of Pacific Oaks College, 2).Phyllis Povell, Long Island University, and 3).Nancy Thompson, University of South Carolina . Each has long been attracted to Sylvia as a teacher and writer, and have visited New Zealand, Aspen, and Vancouver and her archives at Boston College, and recently empowered me to inform all interested about these coming works. After more than twenty years of disregard and neglect, the day may soon arrive when the value of Sylvia Ashton-Warner's contribution to the children of the world will receive its just due.

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